

CLAIMS

The invention claimed is:

1. In a method for settling disputes, the steps of:

a first party to a dispute between the first party and a second party communicating to a third party details as to a settlement of a dispute to be funded by a disbursement of funds;

the third party assigning a unique identifying designator to the settlement details;

5 making the settlement details available for electronic access from the third party by the second party by use of the designator and communicating the designator to the second party;

the second party using the designator to electronically access the settlement terms;

10 the second party electronically transmitting either a settlement terms acceptance communication or a settlement terms rejection communication to the third party; and

the third party, after receiving the acceptance communication or the rejection communication, either causing the settlement to be funded by commencing an electronic funds transfer from a designated source if the communication is an acceptance communication and notifying the parties of the acceptance and funds disbursement commencement, or, if the communication is a rejection communication, notifying the first party of the receipt of the rejection.

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2. The method of Claim 1, and including the step of the third party, subsequent to receipt of an acceptance communication, transferring selected information as to the dispute and its settlement details to a database adapted to accumulate selected information as to disputes and their settlement details.

3. The method of Claim 2, and in which the database is maintained by the third party, and including the step of the third party making the accumulated selected details contained in the database available for access on a selective basis.

4. The method of claim 3, and in which the selective basis includes the step of the third party causing a report of selected ones of the settlement details accumulated in the database to be generated and transmitted to a fourth party, in response to a request from said fourth party for a report containing settlement details relating to disputes having facts comparable to facts supplied by said fourth party in requesting the report.

5. The method of Claim 4, and in which the fourth party is the same as either the first party or the second party.

6. In a method for resolving a dispute between a first party and a second party through the use of a computer system, and in which the first party has prepared a proposed settlement and transmitted the proposed settlement to the system, the steps of:

- a. the first party providing the second party with a link for a network site to be used for access to the system and a unique designator for accessing the system;**
- b. the second party accessing the system via the network site using the link;**
- c. the second party supplying identifying information required by the system for further access to the system;**
- d. the system verifying the identifying information and, if correct, permitting further access to the system by the second party, or, if incorrect, denying further access to the system to the second party until correct identifying information is supplied; and**
- e. if further access is permitted,**
 - i. the system providing the second party with means to access the terms of a settlement and the options of accepting or not accepting the terms and requiring the second party to agree to supply settlement related data to the system if the settlement terms are accepted;**
 - ii. the system terminating the second party's access if the second party does not agree to accept the settlement terms and supply the settlement related data;**
 - iii. if the second party agrees to accepts the settlement terms and supply**

the settlement related data, the system supplying the second party with a link for the second party to electronically sign the settlement terms;

- iv. the second party electronically signing the settlement terms and providing the system with settlement funds transfer information requested by the system;
- v. the system sending a confirmation number for the transaction to second party and initiating the electronic transfer of the settlement funds; and
- vi. the system sending an electronic message to at least one of the parties that the funds transfer has been initiated.

7. The method of Claim 6, and including the step of the system, subsequent to receipt of an acceptance communication, transferring selected information as to the dispute and its settlement terms to a database adapted to accumulate selected information as to disputes and their settlement terms.

8. The method of Claim 7, and including the step of the system making the accumulated selected terms contained in the database available for access by parties, irrespective of whether such party has participated in settlements as to which selected information has been accumulated in the database, on a selective basis.

9. The method of claim 8, and in which the selective basis includes the steps of a party requesting the system to provide a report containing settlement information relating to disputes having facts comparable to facts supplied by said party in requesting said report; and the system causing a report of selected ones of the settlement information accumulated in the database and having facts comparable to facts supplied by said party in requesting the report to be generated and transmitted to said party in response to said request.

10. A system for assisting in evaluating a claim by a first party against a second party comprising:

- a. accumulating the selected details of claim settlements in a database;**
- b. permitting access to the database through a computerized program to a database subscriber to request an evaluation of the claim;**
- c. requiring the database subscriber to supply a plurality of specific details as to the claim to the program;**
- d. generating a search report by the program of settlements contained in the database involving selected details comparable to the specific details supplied by the subscriber; and**
- e. transmitting the search report to the database subscriber for use by the first party in evaluating the claim.**

11. A method for attempting to resolve a claim by a first party against a second party comprising the steps of:

- a. providing a database in which selected details of claim settlements are to be accumulated and which may be accessed by database subscribers;**
- b. accumulating selected details of claim settlements in the database;**
- c. permitting access to the database through a computerized program to a database subscriber to request an evaluation of the claim;**
- d. requiring the database subscriber to supply a plurality of specific details as to the claim to the program in order to obtain the claim evaluation;**
- e. generating a search report by the program of settlements contained in the database involving selected details comparable to certain of the specific details supplied by the subscriber;**
- f. transmitting the search report to the database subscriber for use by the first party in preparing a proposed settlement of the claim;**
- g. preparing a proposed settlement by the first party of the claim utilizing the search report; and**
- h. transmitting the proposed settlement to the second party.**

- 12. The method of Claim 11, and in which the step of transmitting the settlement proposal to the second party comprises the first party transmitting the settlement proposal to an independent third party, and the third party transmitting the settlement proposal to the second party.**
- 13. A method according to Claim 12, and in which the database is maintained by the third party.**

14. In a method for resolving a dispute between a first party and a second party through the use of a computer system, and in which the first party has prepared a proposed settlement which requires a transfer of settlement funds and transmitted the proposed settlement to the system, the steps of:

- a. providing the second party with a link for a network site of the system and a unique designator for accessing the system through the site by using the link;**
- b. the second party accessing the system via the network site using the link;**
- c. the second party supplying identifying information required by the system to the system to attempt to access the proposed settlement;**
- d. the system verifying the identifying information and, if correct, permitting further access to the proposed settlement by the second party, or, if incorrect, denying further access to the proposed settlement to the second party until correct identifying information is supplied and verified; and**
- e. upon correct identifying information being supplied and verified, the system requiring the second party to supply settlement related data to the system in order to continue further access to the proposed settlement;**
 - i. upon the settlement related data being supplied, the system providing the second party with means to access terms of the proposed settlement and the options of accepting or not accepting the settlement terms, and terminating the second party access to the proposed settlement if the terms are not accepted;**
 - ii. upon second party accepting the settlement terms, the system**

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providing a link for the second party to electronically sign the settlement terms and terminating access to the settlement terms if the second party does not electronically sign the settlement terms using the link;

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- iii. upon the terms being electronically signed, the system requiring the second party to provide the system with information requested by the system in order to transfer the settlement funds if not already provided; and**
- iv. the system initiating the electronic transfer of the settlement funds and sending an electronic message to at least one of the parties that the funds transfer has been initiated.**

15. A method for the disposition of claims asserted between first parties and second parties comprising the steps of:

- a. an independent third party accumulating selected details of claim settlements in a database;**
- b. the independent party permitting selective access to a database subscriber to request an evaluation of a claim;**
- c. the independent party requiring the database subscriber to supply a plurality of specific details as to the claim to be evaluated in order to obtain the claim evaluation;**
- d. the database subscriber supplying the plurality of specific details as to the claim to be evaluated;**
- e. the independent party causing the database to be searched for settlements contained in the database having details generally comparable to the plurality of specific details;**
- f. the independent party causing the generation of a search report of the settlements contained in the database having details generally comparable to at least some of the plurality of specific details supplied by the database subscriber;**
- h. the independent party causing the transmission of the search report to the database subscriber for use by the first party;**
- i. the first party preparing a proposed settlement which is based, at least in part, on the search report and which involves the transfer of settlement**

funds;

j. the first party transmitting the proposed settlement to the independent party;

j. assigning a unique designator to the settlement proposal;

k. providing a second party with a link for a network site maintained by the independent party and the unique designator for accessing the proposed settlement through the site by using the link;

l. the second party accessing the network site by using the link;

m. the second party supplying identifying information required by the independent party to access the proposed settlement;

n. the independent party verifying the identifying information and, if correct, permitting further access to the proposed settlement by the second party, or, if incorrect, denying further access to the proposed settlement to the second party until correct identifying information is supplied and verified;

o. upon correct identifying information being supplied and verified, the independent party requiring the second party to supply settlement related data in order to continue further access to the proposed settlement;

i. upon the settlement related data being supplied, the independent party providing the second party with means to access terms of the proposed settlement and the options of accepting or not accepting the settlement terms, and terminating the second party access to the proposed settlement if the terms are not accepted;

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- ii. upon second party accepting the settlement terms, the independent party providing a link for the second party to electronically sign the settlement terms and terminating access to the settlement terms if the second party does not electronically sign the settlement terms using the link;
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- iii. upon the terms being electronically signed, the independent party requiring the second party to provide information required in order to transfer the settlement funds if not already provided; and
- iv. the independent party initiating the electronic transfer of the settlement funds and sending an electronic message to at least one of
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- the first and second parties that the funds transfer has been initiated; and
- p. the independent party transmitting selected details of the settlement terms to the database for use selectively in generating search reports subsequently.

16. A method for assisting in evaluating a claim asserted by a claimant with respect to an insurance policy issued by an insurer comprising the steps of:

- a. an independent party accumulating selected details of insurance claim settlements in a database;**
- b. the independent party permitting selective access over a secure network to a database subscriber to request an evaluation of the claim;**
- c. the independent party requiring the database subscriber to supply a plurality of specific details as to the claim to be evaluated in order to obtain the claim evaluation;**
- d. the database subscriber supplying the plurality of specific details as to the claim to be evaluated;**
- e. the independent party causing the database to be searched for settlements contained in the database having details generally comparable to the plurality of specific details;**
- f. the independent party causing the generation of a search report of the settlements contained in the database having details generally comparable to the plurality of specific details supplied by the subscriber; and**
- h. the independent party causing the transmission of the search report to the database subscriber over the secure network.**

17. A method for settling claims asserted by claimant/counsel with respect to an insurance policy issued by an insurance carrier comprising the steps of:

- a. the carrier authorizing a claims representative 112 to investigate settlement of the claim;**
- b. the claims representative accessing a computerized system 114 which can access a proprietary database 117 containing a compilation of details of prior settlements of insurance claims and is capable of comparing details of the claim against details of prior claim settlements in order to generate a report as to comparable claim settlements;**
- c. the claims representative 112 submitting claim details to the system 114 and requesting generation of a comparables report from the prior settlements of insurance claims information;**
- d. the database 117 generating the comparables report and transmitting it to the claims representative 112;**
- e. the claims representative 112 formulating a proposed settlement based, at least in part, on the comparables report;**
- f. the claims representative 112 transmitting the settlement proposal to the system 114, together with identity information as to a claimant/counsel 115 for use by the system 114 in authorizing access by the claimant/counsel 115 to the settlement proposal;**
- g. the system 114 generating a unique designator for the proposed settlement by which the claimant/counsel 115 can access the proposed settlement by a link to**

the system 114;

25 **h. the unique designator and the system link is provided to the claimant/counsel 115;**

i. the claimant/counsel 115 accessing the system 114 by using the link provided by the claims representative 112 and providing the unique designator and information to confirm the identity information supplied by the claims representative 112 before the system 114 permits access to the settlement proposal by use of the unique designator;

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j. the system 114 verifying the identity information supplied by the claimant/counsel 115 and permitting access to the settlement proposal by the claimant/counsel 115 by use of the unique designator;

k. after access is permitted, the system 114 requiring claimant/counsel 115 to supply specified settlement related data pertaining to the claim being settled to the system database 117;

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l. the claimant/counsel 115 supplying the specified settlement related data;

m. the system 114 verifying that the claimant/counsel 115 has provided the specified settlement related data;

40 **n. the system 114 providing claimant/counsel 115 with means to access the proposed settlement and the options of accepting or not accepting the settlement proposed settlement;**

o. the claimant/counsel 115 accepting the terms of the proposed settlement;

p. the system 114 providing claimant/counsel 115 with a link to electronically sign

- 45 the proposed settlement;
- q. the claimant/counsel 115 electronically signing the proposed settlement and
providing the system 114 with information required to transfer the settlement
funds;
- r. the system 114 providing a confirmation number for the transaction to
50 claimant/counsel 115;
- s. the system 114 initiating the electronic transfer of the settlement funds from an
account designated by the carrier or the claims representative 112 to an account
designated by the claimant/counsel 115.
- t. the system 114 receiving notification from the source of the settlement funds
55 when the funds transfer has been initiated;
- u. the system 114 sending an electronic message to one or both of the claims
representative 112 and claimant/counsel 115 that the funds transfer has been
initiated;
- v. the system 114 editing the specified settlement data to remove any information
60 identifying the participants in the settlement,
- w. the system 114 sending the edited specified settlement data to the database 117
and deactivating the unique designator; and
- x. the edited specified settlement data is added to the details of prior settlements of
insurance claims compilation of the database 117 so as to be subsequently
65 accessible by database subscribers 118 on a selective basis for claim evaluation
and settlement proposal formulation purposes.